

## **A TABLE IN THE STORM**

**Pentecost 16 – 9/4/05 – Canterbury UMC – Communion – Bill Morgan**

**Philippians 4. 11-13:** *I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.*

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**WHEELBARROW REFLECTIONS** Palm Sunday 1994, tornadoes hit Alabama. 18 people died in worship at Goshen UMC, near Piedmont. Among them was Hannah, four-year-old of pastor parents Dale and Kelly Clem. In “Winds of Fury, Circles of Grace,” Dale tells of finding his small red wheelbarrow in their yard a few days after the storm. Trees snapped, fence blown away, storage shed mangled, debris was everywhere. Yet the little red wheelbarrow that had belonged to his grandparents, that he often rode his young daughters in around the yard, was exactly where he had left it before the storm.

“To me, that little red wheelbarrow represented endurance. It survived winds and chaos, became a symbol of faith. It endured, would now carry us around to clean up the mess, put our lives back together. Strange to give an object a personality, but somehow, this tool and I have been friends since I was a boy, and my grandparents used it in their yard. It served them well. After their deaths, it became mine. Now, it symbolized faith – our faith that endured the storm, our faith that will carry us through the dark days to come.”

It’s not a red wheelbarrow. It’s a table. The Lord’s Table. With countless people through the centuries and around the world, people in God alone knows how many life storms, we gather at this table in our storm. The Lord’s Table is not magic, doesn’t make us immune to hurt. I cannot explain it. I can only confess it. This Table, its Holy Sacrament, by God’s grace and mystery, brings Jesus and his love close. It gives us strength to love, live, and serve in the storms of our world and hearts. Not for the first time or last time, we come to this table in the storm.

**WHERE ELSE CAN WE GO?** In old “I Love Lucy” shows, re-runs of which many of us grew up on, there is a recurring scene. Lucy, often along with Ethel, gets into another jam-scheme-mess. Husband Ricky, eyes bulging, arms waving, in his Spanish tuned English, exclaims: “Luuucy! You’ve got some ‘splaining to do!”

No laughing matter now, there’s a part of us that wants to exclaim: “God! You’ve got some explaining to do!” Hurricane-Tsunami-war wrecked lives. Life hurricane horrors faced by Natalee Hollaway’s family, maybe some life storm you face now. Loving God? Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature? God, Jesus, some explaining, please.

There’s a poignant passage in John 6. Some disciples can’t take it; they leave Jesus. Jesus asks Simon Peter if he wants to leave, too. Simon says: “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Life is wonderful. But sooner or later, life turns tougher-rougher than we want it to be. In the name of suffering children, French philosopher Albert Camus protested the goodness and existence of God. In the presence of malignant cells in people we love, we ponder the power, love, and existence of God. Yet, there is the sheer gift of life. That .0001% of

cells grow malignant: tragedy. That 99.999% grow healthy: wonder. That fierce winds-fires reshape-resculpt landscapes-coastlines: at times tragedy. That seasons – wind, sun, and rain – across the centuries in astonishing order come and go, producing food and replenishing the earth: wonder. If we leave Jesus and his creator God, then we have more explaining to do for the wonder than God has to do for the tragedy.

Not for the first or last time, with honest questions, even with faithful anger at God, where else would we go but to this table in the storm? Who else gives us such joy for living, love for serving, and hope for dying?

**HURRICANE GRACE & OTHER OXYMORONS** If what I attempt to say sounds like I am saying this murderous hurricane is a blessing in disguise, then someone please come quickly and slap me in the mouth. And by the way, those who say the hurricane is God's wrath for the casinos also need someone to slap them in the mouth. Yet, in this great darkness, the light of God's love and grace may shine brighter.

In spite of protests of inequality, the hurricane has been a great leveler. Life is fragile for us all. No one is immune to tragedy. Jesus has taught us all along that God loves all the children of the world. In its savage way, the storm reminds us whether we are Muslim or Methodist, Buddhist or Baptist, Assembly of God or Atheist, Jewish or Jehovah Witness, lily white or ebony black, we have far more in common than in difference. The hurricane has been a great giver and reliever of stress. Though I have been somewhere between numbness and nausea this week, I realize anew that most of the junk we worry about is just not worth it. Dark hurricanes can reveal shining grace, can unleash great love.

To the Romans, Paul writes not that God makes everything happen or that everything that happens is good; he writes that in all things God is the force-source-power that works for good. From a Roman jail, Paul writes to his friends in Philippi, 'I know what it is for things to be good in my life and I know what it is for things to be bad – what I have discovered is that God's love in Jesus gives me the strength to deal with it all.'

So, in this storm, we come to the Lord's Table. We come to Jesus who gives us strength to take the untakable, go on after the un-go-on-afterable. Even more importantly just now, we come to this table in the storm to be empowered to be means-channels of God's grace for others. We will open our doors, will write generous checks, will make relief packs, maybe in time travel to give Carpenter's Hands help. In such storms, where else would we go to and be sent from other than this Table.